



SR 502 Interchange Project: Frequently Asked Questions

Why is WSDOT building this interchange?

This interchange is intended to:

- Ease congestion and improve safety both northbound and southbound on I-5.
- Improve safety at the NE 179th Street interchange by reducing congestion.
- Improve safety on I-5 by reducing weaving between the junction of I-5 and I-205 and the existing NE 179th Street exit.
- Improve access to Battle Ground.

When constructed, this new interchange will provide an additional access point from SR 502 to I-5. The new SR 502 connection will also reduce travel times by shortening the route and providing a more direct connection to I-5, a controlled-access highway.

The new connection from I-5 to SR 502 will also improve mobility along I-5 through north Clark County. Safety at the I-5/NE 179th Street interchange will be further improved by reducing the number of vehicles on the northbound off-ramp, and by reducing lane change conflicts between NE 179th Street and the I-5/I-205 junction.

Why was the NE 219th Street vicinity selected for an interchange rather than another major road such as NE 259th Street?

The I-5/I-205 North Corridor Study completed in 2001 analyzed 14 miles of I-5 and I-205 from the Padden Parkway north through the NE 134th Street interchange to La Center. That study addressed potential interchanges with I-5 at NE 219th Street and with I-5 at Carty Road and NE 50th Avenue. The study recommended the NE 219th Street area because it connected directly with SR 502 into Battle Ground.

The I-5/NE 219th Street Access Decision Report (2001) reassessed potential interchanges (NE 199th Street, NE 219th Street and Carty Road) and evaluated significant upgrades to the I-5/NE 179th Street interchange. After examination, it was concluded that an interchange within a half-mile north or south of NE 219th Street on I-5 would best serve the transportation needs for I-5, Battle Ground, and north Clark County. The option also is the most appropriately spaced of any of the other interchange options. It provides the most direct connection to points near Battle Ground and northeast of I-5 without significant reconstruction of existing rural roadways.

How did WSDOT develop the various alignment options?

The project team used two levels of evaluation to develop the options. Originally, WSDOT evaluated 12 options (including several submitted by the public) using a first level of screening. Answers to all of the following questions had to be “yes” for an option to proceed to the second level of evaluation.

- Does the option meet basic safety goals?
- Does the option meet the Federal Highway Administration’s requirements for project location?
- Will this option provide an acceptable environmental outcome?

Three options moved forward to the second level. Since two of these were very similar, they were combined into one option. The two final options (Option C and Option E-4) were then evaluated using the following details:

- Number of streams that will be crossed.
- Acres of land required to replace wetlands disturbed by this project.
- Number of potentially hazardous material sites that may be encountered.
- Disruption to forested areas and/or land adjacent to water (riparian areas).
- Acres of private property to be acquired.
- Number of residences to be relocated.
- Number of businesses to be relocated.

Initially, it was concluded that Option E-4 best answered these questions.

How was Option M developed?

After a March 2004 open house, as part of the federal requirements for a project of this nature, WSDOT began a series of more detailed technical studies on the effects of Option E-4 such as the effects on the natural and built environment (wetlands and residential or commercial property) as compared to the existing conditions or “No-Build Alternative.” This detailed study and additional design refinements are normal at this stage of the project to develop an option that best meets area transportation needs (such as safety and congestion relief) while balancing costs and minimizing impacts on the natural and built environment.

As a result of the more thorough evaluation, Option C and E-4 were found to be more comparable than at the conclusion of the second level evaluation. The new Option M (for “modification”), which is a combination of elements from Option E-4 and Option C, was then considered to determine whether it had fewer overall impacts than Option E-4 and whether it better met area transportation needs and other project criteria. Environmental impacts, safety, and right-of-way issues were considered to determine the specific alignment of Option M. WSDOT then assessed Option M at the same level of detail as Option E-4. Eventually, both options were evaluated using a third level screening process. Subsequent environmental fieldwork on Option M occurred during summer 2004.

As a result of this further study, Option M-South, compared to Option E-4, was found to affect 15 to 20 percent less property and disrupt half the acreage of wetlands. It has the added feature of not bypassing businesses in Duluth.

Were any other criteria considered in the evaluation?

WSDOT combined input from property owners on NE 219th Street with more detailed information on issues such as residential and commercial septic systems, along with environmental impacts, safety, alignments, and estimated construction costs. Based on this information, Option M-South was chosen as the “recommended build alternative” (RBA) in September 2004.

What is the alignment of Option M-South?

Option M-South maintains the current alignment of NE 219th Street with additional widening, primarily to the south of the existing road. Two other alternatives, Option M-North, with additional widening to the north of the existing road, and Option M-Center, with additional widening on both sides of the existing road, were also considered. Following thorough evaluation of the three options, Option M-South was determined to best meet the project goals.

How will Option M-South impact the intersection of NE 10th Avenue and NE 219th Street?

The alignment of Option M-South will extend NE 219th Street west through the current intersection to connect with the new I-5 interchange. The existing NE 219th Street and NE 10th Avenue intersection will be widened and its vicinity improved for safety and efficient traffic flow. Improvements will include signalization, center medians, left-turn lanes, and right-turn-only lanes.

Why did WSDOT change configuration of the northbound on-ramp to I-5 after it accepted Option M-South as the RBA?

WSDOT’s goal throughout the project is to make sure the latest and most detailed information leads to the best decisions. These decisions will result in the option that best meets area transportation needs while minimizing impacts on the environment and area properties.

After the September 2004 choice of Option M-South as the RBA, WSDOT began a detailed study to determine the alignment that would have the least environmental impact, including natural, ecological, social, and economic. Through this study, a new northbound loop ramp was identified that is more environmentally friendly, impacts fewer property owners, and provides a better alternative to the design challenges of the previous northbound ramp. Specifically, the new loop ramp has less impact on Gee Creek because, unlike the original configuration, it does not cross the creek. It also requires less excavation and construction, saving taxpayers approximately \$1 million.

Is a connection from the interchange to the west side of I-5 possible?

Yes. WSDOT will design this project so that a west-side connection could be built. However, a west-side connection, from a new I-5 interchange in the vicinity of NE 219th Street is not part of Clark County's Comprehensive Plan.

A state route or interstate highway cannot connect to a county road if that connection is not part of the county's Comprehensive Plan. It is the county's responsibility to determine which county roads connect to state routes and interstates, and how they connect in residential and commercial districts. This decision rests solely with the county and is separate from this interchange project.

Will WSDOT rezone surrounding residential properties to commercial?

No. WSDOT does not have the authority to rezone. Clark County is responsible for rezoning and changing residential properties to commercial requires a change in Clark County's Comprehensive Plan. WSDOT's plan, regardless of which option is constructed, must operate within the existing parameters of county zoning.

How much impact will there be to the wetlands?

It is estimated Option M-South, with the new northbound loop ramp, would impact up to 6 acres of wetland. Clark County, the State of Washington, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers require projects that impact wetlands to provide mitigation (or compensation) for impacts. It is anticipated that the impact in the project area will require approximately 12 acres of wetland mitigation.

WSDOT is completing a wetlands measurement, which may change the estimated wetland impacts and mitigation.

What is NEPA?

NEPA stands for the National Environmental Policy Act, which promotes efforts to prevent or eliminate damage to the environment. Environment, in NEPA, includes social, economic, natural, and other factors. To carry out the intent of NEPA, projects such as the proposed SR 502 interchange that use federal funds are required to examine the effects of a project on its environment and disclose those effects to the public. Steps involved in fulfilling NEPA requirements include:

- Defining the purpose and need for a project;
- Analyzing alternatives (including the no-action alternative);
- Evaluating the environmental consequences of a proposed action;
- Providing opportunities for public involvement in the process;
- Ensuring compliance with other applicable regulations; and
- Making technically sound decisions and disclosing these decisions to the public.

When will a final decision on Option M-South be made?

As part of the NEPA process, an Environmental Assessment is being prepared to evaluate the potential impacts of Option M-South on the environment. The Environmental Assessment studies a broad range of resources—both built environment (land use, economic, social elements, etc.) and natural environment (wetlands, biological, etc.). This evaluation, compared to the preliminary environmental analysis conducted earlier in the project, is more detailed and considers the design engineering of an option. The Environmental Assessment is scheduled to be available for public review in summer/fall 2005. After addressing public comments on the assessment, FHWA will issue a decision on the level of environmental impacts. If the FHWA issues a finding of no significant impact (FONSI), the project will move to final design, right-of-way acquisition, and construction.

What is the project timeline?

- **Fall 2003:** October 21, 2003 Environmental Assessment Open House and Scoping Meeting to introduce the project and gather public comments. Preliminary concept alternatives illustrated possible options for I-5 on- and off-ramps and their connection to local roads.
- **Fall 2003–Winter 2004:** Preliminary concept alternatives developed in more detail and additional alternatives developed from public input. WSDOT began to identify potential impacts of each alternative.
- **Spring 2004:** March 25, 2004 Open House with public discussion of options and evaluation of alternatives.
- **Spring/Summer 2004:** Detailed technical study of Option E-4, focusing on its effects on the natural and built environment. Property owners were invited to May 20 meeting about Option E-4 to learn if their properties would be affected. Began consideration and study of new Option M.

- **Summer 2004:** Postcard sent to project mailing list and letter sent to area property owners regarding the consideration of Option M. Area property and business owners and tenants invited to a meeting on August 12, 2004 to learn more and provide comments regarding both Option M and Option E-4.
- **Winter/Spring 2005:** Access Hearing and adoption of the right-of-way plans.
- **Summer/Fall 2005:** Public review of Environmental Assessment. The assessment will identify potential environmental impacts of the RBA (WSDOT's front-running option).
- **Summer 2005–Fall 2006:** Right-of-way acquisition. WSDOT will purchase property to accommodate for the interchange.
- **Fall 2006:** Final design complete.
- **Spring 2007:** Construction begins.
- **2009:** Construction complete.

How can I get more information?

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